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**U.S. INDICTS HIGH-RANKING MEMBERS
OF NOTORIOUS MEXICAN DRUG CARTEL**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, ANTHONY PLACIDO, the Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division, and MARTIN FICKE, the Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's New York Office, announced today the unsealing of seven Indictments against high-ranking members of a Mexican drug trafficking organization that has imported thousands of kilograms of cocaine, as well as other narcotics, into the United States since 2000.

The Indictments are a part of "Operation Trifecta," a hemisphere-wide investigation that was conducted by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, the United States Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("BICE") and state and local law enforcement agencies in New York, Chicago, Los

Angeles and Arizona. Operation Trifecta also involved the efforts of DEA offices in Mexico City, Hermosillo, Mexico, and Bogota, Colombia, as well as the Mexican Attorney General's Office and the Colombian National Police.

Over the course of this year-long investigation, a federal grand jury in Manhattan returned seven Indictments charging 43 individuals with narcotics trafficking and firearms offenses. These defendants - among more than 200 charged nationwide as a part of Operation Trifecta - are alleged to be associates and high-ranking members of the Ismael Zambada Garcia drug trafficking cartel, one of Mexico's most active importers of cocaine into the United States during the past two years.

According to the Indictment, the investigation in New York resulted in the seizure of approximately 500 kilograms of cocaine. In addition, MARTIN CHAIDEZ, one of the defendants indicted in the Southern District of New York, is charged with attempting to import approximately ten tons of cocaine, seized from a fishing vessel off the Pacific coast of Mexico in December 2001. Of the 43 defendants charged in the Southern District of New York, 21 are already in custody in this District. Five others have been arrested around the country and in Mexico since Monday, as part of a coordinated takedown of more than 100 Zambada Garcia cartel operatives.

Included among the 43 defendants charged in Manhattan

federal court are three alleged high-ranking lieutenants of the cartel. Among these is CHAIDEZ, who, in addition to being charged with attempting to import the ten tons of cocaine seized in Mexico, is also charged in connection with a shipment of 350 kilograms of cocaine seized by the DEA and BICE in Queens in November 2002. Six alleged cartel operatives working under CHAIDEZ, four of whom are already in custody in this District, are also charged with participation in the November 2002 cocaine shipment.

Another of the three alleged high-ranking lieutenants is MANUEL CAMPAS MEDINA, who was arrested this week in Mexico at the request of the United States, pending extradition to New York. CAMPAS MEDINA is alleged to have presided over a cell of the cartel that transported cocaine from Mexico to New York in hidden compartments in vehicles. According to the Indictment, on July 12, 2003, the DEA and ICE seized 56 kilograms of cocaine concealed in a pickup truck that had been driven to Queens by one of CAMPAS MEDINA's operatives. One of those arrested in connection with that seizure, FRANK PELLEGRINO of Staten Island, was later found to possess approximately \$600,000 in suspected narcotics proceeds at his home, the Indictment charged. In addition, three firearms, several instructional books on how to make silencers and a booklet on how to make and detect car bombs

were found at PELLEGRINO's Staten Island consulting business.

The United States has also requested the Mexican Attorney General's Office to arrest SANTIAGO CHAVEZ-AYON, one of the leaders of a cartel cell that operated extensively in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. CHAVEZ-AYON and 14 of his operatives are charged in an Indictment alleging narcotics conspiracy and firearms offenses.

In September 2002, the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, aided by agents of the BICE's New York Office, seized approximately 30 kilograms of cocaine and three firearms from operatives of the CHAVEZ-AYON cell in the Bronx and upper Manhattan. According to the Indictment, two firearms, a silencer and more than 100 rounds of ammunition were seized in May 2003, during the arrest of JAIME CHAVEZ, a high-ranking member of the CHAVEZ-AYON cell.

ISMAEL ZAMBADA GARCIA and two other lieutenants have been indicted for narcotics trafficking offenses by a federal grand jury sitting in Washington, D.C. The United States has requested that Mexican authorities arrest ZAMBADA GARCIA pending extradition, but his whereabouts are currently unknown.

Mr. COMEY praised the outstanding investigative efforts of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, which includes agents and officers of the DEA, New York City Police Department,

and New York State Police. Mr. COMEY also praised the outstanding efforts of BICE's New York Office. In addition, Mr. COMEY thanked the Mexican Attorney General's Office and Colombian National Police for their assistance in the investigation, and in effecting the arrests of individuals over whom extradition is sought.

Mr. COMEY stated: "The massive effort by the DEA, BICE and this Office has effectively dismantled the U.S. infrastructure of one of the world's most prolific and dangerous drug cartels. The investigation has shown that even cunning and aggressive narcotics traffickers can be stopped with sophisticated and aggressive investigative cooperation and techniques."

If convicted, the defendants each face a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a \$4 million fine.

Assistant United States Attorneys JOSHUA A. LEVINE, ANIRUDH BANSAL and ERIC SNYDER are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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